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CREATING SENIOR MILITARY ADVISORS

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Creating Senior Military Advisors

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SUMMARY

Civilian policymakers at the highest levels of government have professional military advisors. Regardless of their other qualifications, these advisors must have an expertise in the fundamental military function, "the management of violence." Other qualifications they require include an ability to think, speak, write, and decide; to have a flexible mind, alert to change, and a broad knowledge of economics and politics. Many of these qualifications are gained through a lifetime of education, predating commissioning. Service assignments, military experience, civil schooling and military schooling all provide additional qualifications to the officer and polish some of the qualifications he already possesses. Preparation for an assignment as top level advisor involves education, training and experience. Military schools and colleges not only prepare officers for military jobs but also provide them with military expertise essential to an advisor. It is mandatory that the demands for formal education not detract from the requirement for practical military experience. For this reason, it is recommended that officers not attend civilian graduate school until they have some military experience as an officer.

CREATING SENIOR MILITARY ADVISORS

Today, the civilian policymakers at the highest levels of government rely on professional military advisors to help them formulate national military policy and to integrate that policy with foreign policy. Individually and corporately, the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff advise the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the individual Service Secretaries on major foreign policy matters. In addition, there is military membership on an almost unlimited number of policy setting and policy coordinating committees in the nation's capital. These committees frequently include membership from the White House, the State Department, Department of Defense, Agency for International Development and United States Information Agency. Moreover, Mr. McNamara relies heavily on his civilian assistants to analyze the recommendations of the military services, to make decisions on many of these service recommendations, and to make recommendations to him in others; senior military officers serve as advisors to most of these policymakers and policy influencers. It is apparent that military advisors greatly influence United States national policies. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the qualifications needed by these advisors, to discuss how the services presently develop the essential qualifications in these advisors, and to highlight several areas where improvement is indicated.

QUALIFICATIONS

Professor Samuel Huntington has stated that the distinguishing characteristics of any profession are expertise, responsibility and corporateness. Of these, expertise is the primary characteristic that the national policymaker expects from his professional military advisor. But expertise in what?--international relations, physical sciences, sociology, law, economics, systems analysis, business administration, accounting? All of these fields are important and all are practiced in the military. However, the civilian decision maker can hire experts in these fields who are at least as knowledgeable as his military advisor.

Elihu Root, the father of the modern military education system in this country, and Secretary of War at the turn of the century, stated the purpose of the military education system as follows, "It should be kept constantly in mind that the object and ultimate aim of all this preparatory work is to train officers to command men in war."¹

The Primary function performed in the military remains the conduct of war. All other functions performed in the military and in the Department of Defense are peripheral to this central function and must be subordinated to it. Since this is so, the unique qualification the professional military advisor offers the national policymaker is an

¹Elihu Root, "Extract from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1901," in The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States. Addresses and Reports, Vol. 2, p. 390.

expertise in the waging of battles, "the management of violence." And the man whom the decision makers cannot hire to advise them is the "manager of violence."

Besides this unique expertise, what qualifications does the senior advisor need? First, he needs an ability to think, to assimilate large quantities of facts and data, to reason, to write and speak effectively, and most of all, to make decisions. These are qualifications that reflect a lifetime of education, training and experience. It follows that the preparation of an officer for high level advisory assignments begins before he is commissioned, and continues throughout his career.

Second, it is imperative that our top Department of Defense decision makers, who must decide how to commit half the federal budget, be aware of the latest technological developments. This demands that the senior advisor be aware of changes in technology, and the impact these changes will have on tactics, administration and logistics.

In "The Influence of Military Judgement on Defense Decisions," Renkin and Stencil observed,

Commanders who have taken advantage of the modifications in tactics made possible by the progress of armaments, industry, and transportation usually have been successful. Napoleon, one of the most alert of leaders, said tactics must be changed every ten years. In other words, there was then, as there is now, a continuous need to be alert to the advantages of change.²

²Henry A. Renkin and Walter J. Stencil, "The Influence of Military Judgement on Defense Decisions." Naval Review 1966, p. 194.

The explosive changes in nearly all the disciplines have put a special drain on the military to maintain currency. For example, the technological explosion has provided new and better equipment to be put in the hands of troops. New equipment, such as tactical nuclear weapons, has demanded the development of new tactics and new strategy. These, in turn, have required the development of new organizations and changes to the force structure. The senior advisor must be prepared to recommend and justify to the decision maker manpower and budgeting changes. Even the present day analytical tools used to develop and present recommendations and decisions are new. It is apparent that the senior military advisor must have a flexible mind, adaptable to change, and alert to the advantage to be gained from the newest methodologies and technologies.

Third, some knowledge of politics and economics is essential to the professional military officer who advises our top level civilian policy makers. For example, the increasing United States military involvement in Vietnam bears testimony to the need for a knowledge of both. The solution to the problems in Vietnam will be found more in the development of a viable economy and a sound method of political administration from the hamlet level to the national level than in the pure application of military power. The US policy on nuclear proliferation is another example where several disciplines are required. The possession of nuclear weapons by any nation has tactical military applications easily understood by most military officers. That there are political overtones cannot be denied; as a matter of

fact, the ultimate US policy on nuclear proliferation will be primarily political. Moreover, the economic ramifications cannot be overlooked. For example, a country may feel it must have nuclear weapons, both for military use and for the power status they bring, but that country may wreck itself economically by developing a nuclear production industry. It is not argued that an American professional military officer will determine the US nuclear proliferation policy. But some military professional must be capable of learnedly discussing all aspects of the problem with the elected or appointed civilian official who will. These two examples serve to emphasize that politics, economics and military policy are inseparable. The military advisor must be knowledgeable in all.

EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER

In his discussion of military professionalism, Professor Huntington stated that professional education is two phased. One phase imparts a broad, liberal, cultural background, while the other imparts the specialized skills and knowledge of the profession. The broad background is provided the senior military advisor during his college undergraduate days and during his attendance at the senior service colleges. The specialized knowledge of his profession is gained through the experiences of a lifetime in service. Military writings and service schools teach a great deal, and their contribution to professional education should not be underrated. But as a study performed for the US Senate concluded,

"For the . . . officers of most . . . national security agencies, assuming a good educational background, experience is almost always the best teacher."³

The officer can gain fundamental knowledge of his own service only by continuous experience in that service beginning at the lowest possible level. A ground combat officer who would learn the management of violence would best begin to learn it at platoon--company level. Who would be better qualified to know the reactions, feelings and experiences of men in combat than he who has been there? Knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of those who are tired, hungry, cold, perhaps lost, and surely scared can best be learned in combat. This experience will be carried by the officer throughout his career and will assure that the high level decisions he influences or makes himself will have a fundamental practicality.

In the absence of combat experience, realistic field training with a unit is the only substitute. Even this has its limitations. Lieutenant Colonel William J. Prescott pointed out the problem of communicating battle experiences and sensations in his article "Combat" in the December 1965 issue of Army: "Combat cannot be described any more than a new mother can describe the experience of childbirth in order to prepare her sister for the same ordeal."⁴

³United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, Administration of National Security: The Secretary of State. p. 11.

⁴William J. Prescott, "Combat," Army, Vol. 15, Dec. 1965, p. 42.

General MacArthur was one of the most prominent and influential soldiers of this century. He travelled widely throughout Asia as a Lieutenant, and gained firsthand knowledge of the Orient which helped to prepare him for his duties during and after World War II; it is doubtful that he could have learned these things as well in a classroom. But where General MacArthur had his greatest preparation for his duties as Army Chief of Staff and as Commander of the Phillipine Army was during World War I in the trenches of France. His recommendations to President Roosevelt concerning preparations for and conduct of the Asiatic Campaign reflected the practicality and expertise of the experienced combat veteran.

The argument regarding nuclear power for surface ships is another demonstration of the requirement for military experience. Mathematical cost comparisons between conventional and nuclear propulsion can be made easily. These may well show that it is much cheaper and usually as effective to use conventional propulsion. While the advantages gained from the tactical and strategic freedom of action provided by nuclear propulsion are not precisely measurable, they could be decisive factors in a future war. Such considerations would not necessarily be apparent to the civilian decision maker, nor to his non-military advisors. It is essential, therefore, that we avoid the situation where "major advisory influence on procurement decisions is wielded by those who never have borne and never will bear the operational responsibility for the execution of wartime tasks."⁵

⁵Renkin and Stencil, op. cit., p. 202.

EDUCATION IN THE SCIENCE OF WAR

When Secretary of War Root laid the cornerstone at the Army War College (now the site of the National War College) he made the following observation on the necessity for professional military education:

It is a common observation, and a true one, that practical qualities in a soldier are more important than a knowledge of theory. But the officer who keeps his mind alert by intellectual exercise, and who systematically studies the reasons of action, and the materials and conditions and difficulties with which he may have to deal, will be the stronger practical man and the better soldier. The same considerations which have led individual enterprise to build up the great universities and technical schools to which the graduates of our schools and colleges resort to perfect themselves in every profession and every branch of applied science, apply with equal force to education in the science of war.⁶

The military education program includes a complex of military schools whose origins date back to the last century. These schools are branch oriented and teach basic military tactics and techniques. The Army's senior tactical school is the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth; it is here that the complex relationships between the military and the balance of the government are first taught in the Army School System. General George C. Marshall attributed much of his success to his attendance at Fort Leavenworth. He attended in 1906, a second lieutenant with four years service, after which he observed:

⁶Elihu Root, "The Army War College. Address at the Laying of the Cornerstone, Washington D.C., February 21, 1903." op. cit., p. 123.

I finally got into the habit of study, which I never really had before. I revived what little I had carried out of college . . . but it was the hardest work I ever did in my life . . . I learned how to learn.⁷

Today, geography and politics are introduced to the Army school system at the Command and General Staff College level, but the curriculum is still primarily tactical--how to wage combat on the battlefield. General Marshall said that all he ever learned of tactics he learned at Fort Leavenworth. Knowledge of tactics is essential to the field grade officer to prepare him for increasingly important troop assignments. But in addition, the Leavenworth course provides instruction in the organization and functioning of the Department of Defense. Such background knowledge together with an increased expertise in the science of war help to prepare the officer for subsequent duty as a military advisor in the higher echelons of government.

Many officers continue their formal military educations through attendance at one of the war colleges. There are five such colleges: The National War College, The Industrial College of the Armed Forces, The United States Army War College, The United States Naval Warfare Course and the United States Air Force War College. These colleges are conducted for senior officers in the grade of colonel/captain and lieutenant colonel/commander. The courses are conducted at the

⁷George C. Marshall, as quoted by Forrest C. Pogue, George C. Marshall, Education of a General, 1880-1939, pp. 96, 101.

graduate level and are designed to educate rather than train. The five colleges follow different programs of instruction which tend to reflect the desires and experience of the incumbent commandant. However, the courses are common to the extent that the bulk of the instruction consists of lectures by eminent scholars, and the instructional content is aimed at an understanding of national strategy. Since national strategy is based on all elements of national power, and is cast in the existing world environment, the courses are heavily salted with political science and economics. Because most of the students are experienced military officers, the dosages of military tactics and military organization are not as high as might be expected.

The stated mission of the United States Army War College is "to prepare selected senior officers for command and high level staff duties with emphasis upon army doctrine and operations and to advance interdepartmental and interservice understanding."⁸ It is my analysis that the program of instruction at the Army War College is adequate to satisfy this mission. Moreover, the multiservice and multidepartmental composition of the student body reinforces the curriculum. The 1965-1966 student body consists of 205 personnel; 165 army officers, 16 air force officers, ten naval officers, six marines, and eight government civilians. The attendance of the representatives of the other services and the civilians contributes to the advancement of interservice and interdepartmental understanding. Moreover, these

⁸US Army War College, Curriculum Pamphlet, 1965-66, p. 1.

personnel contribute a different outlook on world events, broadening the perspectives of the military professionals to better prepare them to advise the decision makers at the pinnacle of government.

Edward L. Katzenbach has written a critical analysis of the war colleges, their curricula and their faculties. He was critical of the fluid nature of the faculties, changing every three or four years. A similar criticism could be made of the Command and General Staff College. However, the disadvantages resulting from personnel turbulence are more than offset by the advantages gained from a fluid faculty. These advantages include fresh viewpoints, first hand knowledge of current military problems and awareness of changing technologies. Moreover, the student body complements the faculty in the process of education. In committee seminar, formal presentation, and informal social discussion, the diverse backgrounds of the student body are employed. Students present real problems from past assignments, cross fertilize the minds of fellow students with solutions to these problems and update the student body to technological and doctrinal changes. This reservoir of knowledge is of inestimable value to the officer in his later assignments advising civilian decision makers.

BROADENING PERSPECTIVES

Colonel Robert N. Ginsburgh has made a superb analysis of military professionalism. In his analysis, he has suggested that it would be desirable to have a greater exchange of personnel among the military services; an officer could move from the Army to the Air Force to the

Navy. Such a plan would develop,

Broad-gauged military professionals who can speak with authority on a full spectrum of military matters rather than a collection of individual experts in air, land, and sea. The more specialized expertise is still needed, but the military must also develop the generalists who can fuse together the particular competence of the specialists.⁹

In addition to the requirement for wide military expertise which can be met from interservice mobility, the military generalist can be made more knowledgeable in the political and economic forces that shape our foreign policy through interdepartmental exchanges; these exchanges provide for military officers to be assigned to the State Department, Central Intelligence Agency, The White House, and to duty in legislative liaison. Such assignments serve a variety of useful purposes. First of all, the receiving agency acquires an expert who is prepared to give to his associates advice on military matters. Second, the assignments make for a mutual understanding among the agencies, facilitating a free exchange of ideas at the desk officer level in Washington, and in the country team overseas. And, finally, the military professional acquires a broadened perspective on political, social, and economic matters. These latter will be especially useful as he reaches advisory positions at the higher levels of government.

⁹ Robert N. Ginsburgh, "The Challenge to Military Professionalism," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 42, January 1964, p. 263.

CIVIL SCHOOLING

In its study of the administration of national security, the US Senate observed, ". . . national security agencies need both specialists and generalists--men and women with good judgement. . . . But a generalist needs a solid foundation in some capacity."¹⁰ All four services have recognized this requirement and have established civil schooling programs to provide the necessary specialist foundation. The civilian courses of study augment the military schools. Civilian courses are mostly graduate level, usually leading to a master's degree, although a few officers have earned doctorates. These programs not only add to the broad educational base to which Huntington referred, but also provide the additional skills needed within the services.

For a number of years it was Army policy to send officers to civilian schooling only after some significant period of commissioned service--usually at least five years. In general, the physical sciences student went to graduate school any time after he attended his branch advanced school, while the social science student attended after he went to Command and General Staff College. The rationale behind this delay was twofold--to give the young officer time to learn the fundamentals of the military profession, and to give him and the service an opportunity to see if they were suited to each other. On the other hand, the Air Force has for some time sent a few officers

¹⁰US Congress, op. cit., p. 10.

to civilian universities immediately upon commissioning. The Army has recently followed the Air Force's lead in this policy. The April 1965 edition of the basic directive on civilian schooling, AR 350-200, eliminated any minimum length of service as a prerequisite for graduate schooling; several members of the class of 1965 at the United States Military Academy went to civilian universities directly upon commissioning. This I believe to be a questionable course of action for a number of reasons.

First, upon completion of his civil schooling, the young officer should exercise his new skills while they are still fresh in his mind. As a new Master of Science or Master of Arts, he should serve a utilization tour. But where and doing what? If his utilization tour is his first military assignment, he has no military experience upon which to draw. Therefore, he is of no use as a staff officer at a high enough level where his new speciality would be of use. If military experience is not essential to the job, it would be more efficient to hire a civilian to do it. In this respect, AR 621-108 requires that a Department of the Army board "validate" the military jobs for which civil schooling is required. But the validation board considers only the educational requirements for these jobs and not the experience of the officers to fill them.

Second, junior officers are seldom given jobs that require a combination of military judgement, experience and scientific background. By the time an officer is in a position to use such a combination--to

advise national policy makers--he may have become hazy in those skills he learned in graduate school immediately after commissioning. And at the rate the physical sciences change these days, his previously acquired education may no longer be relevant.

Finally, an officer is a junior officer only once, he has only a few years as a lieutenant or captain in which to learn those fundamental skills he must know to make him an expert in the management of violence. In this respect, Army and Marine Corps officers are faced with a different problem from Air Force officers. In the ground combat arms, the job of a lieutenant is fundamentally different from that of a captain, which is different from that of a major; in other words, platoon level skills and experience are gained only if an officer serves as a lieutenant in a platoon. On the other hand, the aircraft pilot does the same job as a lieutenant, captain, or major; failure to learn basic combat skills as a lieutenant does not preclude subsequent acquisition of the skills.

In his very early commissioned years, the competition for the time of the future senior advisor should be resolved in favor of experience rather than formal education. In other words, it is important that the young officer become expert in the fundamentals of the military profession before acquiring a specialty.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, we must continue to prepare our military officers for senior advisory positions by educating them in the many fields they

have long pursued. Their responsibilities in making policy as well as advising policy makers have increased with the years. The exponential increase in communications has permitted the decision makers to centralize control over both crisis management and violence management. This, in turn, demands faster reaction at the top in making decisions. Most of the major decisions involve political, economic, military and psycho-social overtones; with so many facets to the problems, the decisions must often be based on professional judgement. In this environment of speed, detail, and centralization, the military professional needs all the expertise he can accrue. He needs to acquire the presently popular skills of systems analysis and financial accounting, in addition to the more traditional skills of preparing staff studies and operation orders.

Our military officers are being groomed for duty as senior advisors by their extensive military assignments, in which they gain invaluable experience; through military education in the various service schools and colleges; and through the broadening education provided by civilian schooling and interdepartmental assignments. The importance of these programs was highlighted recently by President Johnson: "It is imperative that our men in uniform have the necessary background and training to keep up with the complexities of the everchanging military, political, and technical problems they face each day."¹¹

¹¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "The State of our Defenses," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 15 Feb. 1965, p. 215.

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